

Cuban Missile Crisis: The Soviet View

Interview with Mr. Sergo Mikoyan, October 13th, 1987,  
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Q.: Mr. Mikoyan, why did the Soviet Union deploy  
MRBMs in Cuba?

A.: In the spring of 1962, we in Moscow were absolutely  
convinced that a second Bay of Pigs was at hand, that  
a new military invasion of Cuba was at hand - but this  
time with all the American military might, not only  
with proxy troops.

Q.: Did Fidel Castro ask for the missiles?

A.: No, he did not. He agreed, but only after he had  
been advised by us and he then thought that it was  
good for the defense of Cuba. We convinced him and he  
agreed.

Q.: But evidently Castro had asked for Soviet weapons.  
Which weapons did he have in mind - SAM-sites for ex-  
ample, surface-to-air missiles to hit American planes?

A.: He asked for defensive weapons, yes, for tanks,  
planes and anti-aircraft-missiles. Not for SAMs, for  
SAMs were exclusively at our disposal. I mean, in this  
case, he did not care who was in control and he wel-  
comed the SAM as a strengthening of Cuban defense. But  
he did not ask for the MRBMs.

Q.: But if you only wanted to defend Cuba against an  
invasion, why did you send MRBMs there? You could have  
easily defended the island with different military  
means, with means less provocative to the American  
sides. Why didn't you restrict the military deliveries  
to anti-aircraft-missiles, tanks and a general streng-  
thening of conventional forces. What did you need  
atomic missiles for?

A.: Well, it looks like a difficult question. But the answer is very simple. You have to take into consideration what we in Moscow thought at the time. We simply thought: the more, the better. We thought, atomic weapons were a much stronger warning to the United States. This is a typical example of deterrence-type of thinking.

Q.: So you do not agree with Krushchev's speechwriter Fedor Burlatsky, who during this conference stated, that the major reason for the deployment of these missiles was to gain strategic parity with the U.S.? Burlatsky recalls Krushchev as follows: "Why do the Americans have to surround us with so many bases, including the base near our border in Turkey? Why don't have we any such right to do the same with the Americans?" In your view, this was not the primary reason?

A.: I strongly disagree with my friend Burlatsky in this case. I think, that the first and most important reason to ship the missiles over was to defend Cuba. Other ideas certainly had a certain impact, but they were only secondary. Most important was to prevent an all-out invasion. You must understand: our intelligence and Cuban intelligence knew what was going on in the US. The Americans called up reserves, had a CIA-program called "Mongoose" to topple Castro concentrated military power in the Caribbean and so on and so forth. That's why we thought that invasion was imminent.

Q.: And yet: you must have known that this was a very provocative move. Didn't you miscalculate the American reaction?

A.: Indeed, there was a great deal of miscalculation and misjudgement on our side. We did not believe that the Americans would react in the way they actually did. Therefore we were completely taken by surprise when President Kennedy delivered his public speech and announced the blockade. The main idea had been to finish the installation before the American midterm elections

and then to inform the US-Government officially.  
By officially I mean on the diplomatic route, not in public. We did not believe that the Americans would or could find out before that. And people in Moscow thought that they would get away with it, that the Americans would grudgingly accept it.

Q.: Did this miscalculation have anything to do with the Soviet image of John F. Kennedy?

A.: Probably. Krushchev indeed appraised him as young, intellectual - in Krushchev's view not necessarily a compliment-, inexperienced, not sufficiently decisive to deal effectively with a crisis or to risk a major crisis. Yes, this may have had a certain additional impact.

Q.: Fedor Burlatsky claims that the crisis could have been avoided if the Americans had approached the Soviets secretly and on diplomatic channels. He thinks that Krushchev would then have given in. This judgement does not fit into your observation that Krushchev grossly misjudged Kennedy. You seem to imply that he would not have been impressed by a private move of the American side.

A.: I think you are right. Here again I hold a view different from Fedor Burlatsky - socialist pluralism, if you wish (Laughs). I think the confrontation would not have been avoided had Kennedy secretly asked to withdraw the missiles.

Q.: There is a lot of speculation, especially in Germany, that Krushchev wanted to use Cuba as a bargaining chip in order to gain American concessions in Berlin. After all, there was a Berlin-crisis in the making just as well. Would you please comment on this Berlin-Cuba-connection?

A.: Well, I don't think that there is a connection. At least none in the way you seem to imply. By the

autumn of 1962 Krushchev had understood the impossibility of any radical change in the situation of West Berlin. I admit, in the late 50s Krushchev had had the idea that he could force the Americans to give up West Berlin. But this was not connected with the missiles in Cuba. It was rather connected with the people like Wladislaw Gomulka from Poland and Walter Ulbricht from the GDR. In 1958, Krushchev was together with Gomulka in Leningrad and Gomulka convinced him that we needed a separate peace treaty with the GDR and a change in the status of Berlin. Otherwise the frontier between Poland and Germany would never be fixed. And Krushchev also had many talks with Walter Ulbricht, who also was a strong man, as you know (Laughs) - and Ulbricht also wanted to finish with West Berlin and its open border, which provided the opportunity for East Germans to go out of the country. So under the influence of these two men Krushchev wanted to force the American hand in West Berlin.

Q.: You sound as if Krushchev alone shared this idea. What about the other members of the Presidium?

A.: Well, I want to give you an example. It was in late 1958, either October or November, when Krushchev delivered a speech on Berlin. He expressed his deep believe in the Potsdam agreement and stated, that this agreement had been violated by the Western powers. Therefore in his view the Potsdam agreement had become null and void - even more so because there is now talk that West Germany should be given atomic weapons and so on. So - why should we be tied to the Potsdam agreement any longer? Our hands should no longer be tied by that agreement. Well, you see, this speech had not been consulted, had not been approved by the Presidium, as the Politburo was called in these days. When Krushchev came back from Leningrad my father, Anastas Mikoyan, talked to him. First of all, he told him: if you do not consult the Presidium on an important matter like this, I shall resign. I cannot carry responsibility

for your irresponsible actions. Second, we need the Potsdam agreement not less than the Americans do and the English and French and the West Berliners. And my father demanded discussion in the Presidium. Well, Krushchev was very irritated. My father knew that Andreji Gromyko, then Minister of Foreign Affairs, now Supreme Council, shared his view, that he too believed the Potsdam Agreement should not be touched. Therefore he told Krushchev: if you don't believe me, go and ask Gromyko. You know, Gromyko, as a man who understood international affairs, he could not agree with Krushchev. But Gromyko was afraid to say so, he was afraid to speak out against Krushchev. So he was silent. And then my father said: I see, the minister is not ready. Let us ask the Ministry for Foreign Affairs to prepare their conclusions: do we need the Potsdam agreement or not? Do we think that it had been violated and was therefore null and void or not? Well, this special report was never written, because the Minister of Foreign Affairs did not want to openly criticize Krushchev. But after that things changed. My father continued to convince him that we need the Potsdam agreement, so we must accomodate ourselves with West Berlin. Krushchev came to understand his mistake - you know, he was very close to my father, they were friends, had known each other ever since the 30s, since '34 or '35 I think, and at the time lived right next to each other. And this was in the end of 1958. After that, Berlin was no longer a serious issue of conflict for us. In fact, in 1959 Krushchev asked my father to go to the United States and to improve relations, to let them know that we were not aggressive and so on.

Q.: So there is no direct link between Berlin and the missile crisis?

A.: No, no direct link. After that episode I just told you, after late 1958, West-Berlin was only a card in Krushchev's diplomatic game. But there was no serious interest in changing the situation.

Q.: You have justed mentioned the attempts and discussions to provide West Germany with atomic weapons. Was Cuba connected with this development?

A.: I only can remember that in fact we feared very much that the Americans would give nuclear missiles to the Federal Republic of Germany. We knew the prestige of Adenauer and we knew how strongly he struggled for such armaments and we felt very unsafe. Such a development would profoundly have changed the whole strategic situation in WEstern Europe. I do not exclude that the deployment of missiles in Cuba was taken and decided within this framework.

Q.: When exactly did the Soviet Government decide to have atomic weapons in Cuba. And who made this decision? Who was instrumental in bringing about the decision?

A.: In the beginning, the idea was expressed by Krushchev himself. He first discussed it at the end of April with my father, at the end of April '62. Then in the beginning of May it was discussed with a small group of people, with Frol Kozlov, with the Minister of Defense, Malinovski, with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Gromyko. The beginning of serious discussions was in early May, including Mr. Alexejew, who was in these days appointed ambassador to Havanna and members of the Presidium. After that it was discussed in the Presidium and the final decision was taken by the Presidium. But the idea was first expressed by Krushchev himself.

Q.: The Chief of the Strategic Rocket Forces of the USSR, Moskalenko, was dismissed from office in the spring of 1962. Did this have anything to do with the discussion about the "Cuban missiles"?

A.: No, this has nothing in common. This was only a coincidence of time. Moskalenko did not criticize the

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deployment of the missiles. Even if he had done so, he could not have had any serious influence, because Marshall Pidesov, the Commander in Chief of all the Strategic missile forces, was in favour of the deployment. You must understand: our military men do not feel themselves independent, they know that they are obliged to fulfill political decisions. Only two people in the Ministry of Defense were influential enough to express strongly their opinion vis-a-vis Krushchev: first of all Marshall Shukov and second Marshall Ustinov. But Ustinov was not a military man. He became Minister of Defense after very, very long work in the Party and the Council of Ministers. The commanders of the army and so on, they were not in a position to argue politically. I forgot to name one more man who also argued: that was Admiral Kuznetsov. He argued, yes. But people like Moskalenko could not oppose the political decisions.

Q.: So you want to imply that there was no opposition against Krushchev's suggestion?

A.: That's right. At that time he did not have any opposition against him. You know, Krushchev was advised by some people, but not by many. This was a very secret operation from the very beginning. Not even all the members of the Central Committee or the Cabinet Ministers were informed. It was only possible to discuss it within a circle of about ten or maybe 15 people, not more.

Q.: During one of the ExComm.-discussions in Washington, Robert Kennedy suspected that not even the Soviet ambassador to the U.S., Anatoli Dobrynin, had been informed. Is this true?

A.: Indeed, Dobrynin was absolutely uninformed. He and Zorin, our representative at the UN, did not know anything. And when Dobrynin was summoned to the State Department and was told about these missiles, he said

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wered to the Secretary of State that this cannot be so. This cannot be so.. This is an invention of the CIA." Dobrynin and Zorin could not know, because all of the operation was organized secretly and with many precautions - as few people as possible were informed. For instance, there was no exchange of cables between Moscow and Havanna, there were only letters sent with people going either way. The deployment should be announced as a fait accompli.

Q.: And yet there were serious shortcomings in carrying out this program. The missile installations in Cuba were not camouflaged. They were out in the open, with everyone knowing that the US had a U-2 reconnaissance all over the island. Nobody in Washington afterwards could make any sense out of it. Some even thought the Soviets were engaged in a willful provocation. What was going on at the time?

A.: Well, the missiles themselves were camouflaged. But the roads leading to the sites were not and this was a serious mistake by our military men. They had order to deceive the Americans, so make false arrangements. For example, they should pretend, that these roads were constructed for some agricultural purposes. But they did not do so. They acted independently and only camouflaged the missiles themselves.

Q.: So Graham Allison is right in saying that these sloppy arrangements were a typical result of routine operations and bureaucratic rules and regulations. The technicians built the missile sites in Cuba as they would have built them back in the USSR. Is this right?

A.: Exactly, yes. They were military men and they only knew the order to build it. And they were used to building these sites at home. They acted in Cuba as if they were in the USSR. So they went out to find some good sites in the mountains or in the hills and began to build it up very, very rapidly. It was sheer luck that

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the Americans did not discover it earlier. October '62 was a very unusual month - there was very bad weather over Cuba for weeks, covering the island from the cameras of American reconnaissance planes. You see, these mistakes could not be prevented - it has something to do with the psychology of military men (laughs) ...

Q.: How did you manage to keep the thing secret in the USSR? What about the military men involved in the preparations? Didn't they get wind of what was going on?

A.: The first stage was organized very well. For instance, the detachments which were sent over by ship to protect the missiles were not told where they were going. They were only told that they would be away from home for a long time. And since it was September, they assembled their necessary winter outfit and took it with them - even the ski s. And only in the middle of the Atlantic ocean were they told that skis would not be needed (laughs) - they were going to Cuba. So there were no problems during this stage. But the final stage, the construction of the missile sites, was badly organized.

Q.: Suppose everything had gone well and the Americans had not detected the sites. Would you have shipped more missiles over? Would Cuba have become a huge deployment area for MRBMs?

A.: The American participants to our meeting believe that there were some more missiles on their way ...

Q.: ... maybe rightly so, because some 14 ships instantly turned around after the blockade had been announced?

A.: ... but I think that the 40 or so missiles which were on the island by October 22nd was everything we had planned to be there. I don't think that we had the intention to bring more. At least I have no information on any plans for additional missiles.

Q.: When President Kennedy announced the blockade - how did Krushchev and his colleagues in the Presidium react?

A.: Well, obviously the first reaction was surprise. Surprise, that the Americans had found out and surprise that Kennedy risked such a thing. And then we wanted to find out how far he would go. See, we knew that despite the blockade some ships had been allowed to pass. Therefore we wanted to find out where Kennedy's limits were.

Q.: And what were his limits, in your eyes?

A.: When some of our submarines in the Caribbean were forced to surface, we knew: this is a sign that war might be at hand. Perhaps this was the episode when we understood that the blockade was a very serious thing.

Q.: Were you afraid that the Americans might use their tremendous atomic superiority in a first strike on the Soviet Union? After all, it was a tense crisis situation, with the Americans controlling some 5 000 warheads as compared to 300 on the Soviet side.

A.: Well, my friend Burlatsky told the story about his friend, a member of the Central Committee, who sent his family out of Moscow. My father did not sent his family out of Moscow (laughs) ...

Q.: ... which doesn't quite answer my question - he might have thought that it was a futile attempt in any event ...

A.: ... well, the overwhelming American superiority, something like 17 to 1, may have had a psychological impact. You must understand that the fear of atomic war is part of our history after 1945 - possibly even more than in any other country. For many years, when we had no atomic weapons, we were waiting for an American

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Q.: During our meeting, Robert McNamara claimed, that in case of an American attack on Cuba, escalation would have been unavoidable. There were -according to CIA-evaluations- some ~~40~~ 000 Soviet troops in Cuba, many of whom would have been killed in an airstrike. For McNamara it was inconceivable then and still is inconceivable that the Soviet Union would not have reacted militarily - somewhere. But where? What were your contingency plans? For example, did you plan to attack Berlin or the American MRBMs in Turkey?

A.: If the Americans had bombed Cuba or if they had invaded the island, I think, we would have had no other choice but to react militarily. I don't know where and I don't know exactly what, but of course Berlin and American missiles in Turkey were first on the list. We would not have reacted immediately, not necessarily the same day. We would have needed time and some further preparations.

Q.: Did you make any serious military preparations? Day after day during the crisis the CIA and other intelligence agencies concluded: no mobilization on the Soviet side. How could you have reacted militarily without any mobilization?

A.: Well, there was no open mobilization, not the type of mobilization which the Americans could immediately discover. But all the armed forces of the Warsaw Pact were put on alert, our submarines were distributed all over the world, our intercontinental ballistic missiles were under readiness condition 1 - I am absolutely convinced of this. The missiles were absolutely ready to answer a first strike by the Americans. But during the crisis, Krushchev had only one thing in mind: to do everything to prevent such a war, to prevent any type of serious escalation.

Q.: We know from the American side that there was an ExComm. advising President Kennedy. What was the crisis

management in Moscow like? Did you also have an "Ex-Comm."? Who advised Krushchev?

A.: Well of course, Krushchev consulted with the members of the Presidium, sometimes with all of them, sometimes with only a few. I think from the very beginning, my father was his closest adviser - he had been to Cuba and was considered as a specialist on Cuba, and he knew Fidel Castro personally. And he was the second man after Nikita, he was his friend. They called each other by their first name. My father had gone a long way together with him - personally and politically - for instance, both of them very heavily involved in the campaign against the cult of personality. They had very good relations, though not very simple, these were contradictory relations, but good relations. Then there was Frol Kozlov, still fairly young and considered by Krushchev as his successor - I personally did not like the man and I think it was a mistake on Krushchevs part to consider him as his successor. But he did. Kozlov therefore was an important advisor. There was Malinovski, our Minister of Defense, and Gromyko, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Marshall Pidosov, Commander of the Air Force and all the strategic missile forces. And in addition there were some other people whom Krushchev constantly worked with.

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Q.: What about Breshnev?

A.: No, he was not so important. He was not respected by Krushchev. Krushchev did not consider him as a very able man.

Q.: Graham Allison states in his book "Essence of Decision" that during the crisis there were serious differences of opinion between the political leadership and the military, that there even was a split. He points out that the editorials of "Red Star" and "Prawda" were on completely different lines. His interpretation is as follows: the military men were the "hardliners" who did not want to give in to the Americans, whereas Krushchev

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was ready to compromise. How do you view Allison's interpretation?

A.: Of course some of Krushchev actions and decisions were discussed. But I can assure you that in the field of foreign affairs there was absolutely no opposition against Krushchev - no opposition which would follow a different line. This was absolutely not the case. I want to insist on this, because especially in the U.S. there is speculation that Krushchev's dismissal might have something to do with the missile crisis. I can assure you that this was not the case. During the days of the crisis and afterwards, I'm sure that there was no opposition in the strong sense of the word, absolutely. There was discussion, but no opposition.

Q.: Well, but this discussion must have been quite controversial. Otherwise it would be hard to explain why Krushchev within twelve hours send two completely different messages to Washington - one on the 16th of October, saying that it was enough if the Americans guaranteed a "non-intervention" in Cuba, and the second on October 27th, demanding that the Jupiter missiles in Turkey should be withdrawn just as well. What happened in Moscow? Why were there two different messages? Why did Krushchev send a second letter?

A.: As I said - there were discussions going on, and there also were different opinions. The first letter obviously was dictated by Krushchev himself - it was not consulted or discussed with anyone else. And the second letter was the result of the work of some other people also. These people included the Jupiter-demand because they thought that this would be an easy way to demonstrate that we could get out of the conflict without loosing face. We knew that for a long time the American government had made attempts to get these missiles out of Turkey. Therefore some people thought that Kennedy would give in on this demand, that he would be willing to strike a compromise on the Jupiters. They figured that this would be a good result for our people and for

world consumption, so to say. It could help us to feel more satisfied with the deal. But if you ask my opinion I think that this move was a mistake.

Q.: There still are many mysteries and dark spots in the history of the 13 days. For example, two days ago Seymour Hersh published a piece of research in the "Washington Post". He claims that in the early morning hours of October 17th, there were heavy fire-fights between Cubans and Soviet troops in the vicinity of a MRBM- and SAM-site. Hersh's sources seem to be convincing. He says that in 1964 American intelligence managed to break the Soviet code used during the crisis and that the messages clearly reveal that these fire-fights had really taken place. What is your comment?

A.: I still would not exclude that the story is a fantasy of the author. And I absolutely exclude any possibility of an armed conflict between our troops and the troops of Fidel Castro. The story came as a complete surprise to me. Before I came here I had no information whatsoever. Absolutely. Never. If such a clash had taken place and if, as Hersh says, some Soviet soldiers had been killed, I would have heard about it in Cuba. Almost certainly I would have heard about it. And I repeat: I am sure that there was no conflict between our troops and Fidel Castro's troops.

Q.: But there might be some different explanations. Could the fire-fights have taken place between Soviet troops and exiled Cubans making commando-raids on the island, or between Soviet troops and some CIA-units?

A.: Well, it could be that there were some elements on the island who gained control in certain parts and who were out to make disorder. If there was a clash, it might have been a clash with these people, with anti-revolutionary forces in Cuba. But I think we can still have some doubts about this story. Neither my father nor any other colleague of his who went to Cuba immediately after the crisis, did hear anything about this.

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Definitely nothing.

Q.: On October 27th, an American U-2 plane was shot down over Cuba. For the ExComm. in Washington there was no doubt: this was a conscious provocation and escalation by Krushchev- the Soviets had ordered the U-2 to be shot down. ~~How~~ was in control of the anti-aircraft batteries and of the surface-to-air missiles in Cuba?

A.: The Cubans only controlled the anti-aircraft missiles reaching up to 11 000 meters. I don't remember the name, but it was only those surface-to-air missiles up to 11 000 meters.

Q.: So the SAM-site which shot down the U-2 must have been under Soviet control?

A.: Yes. Yes. It was under our control.

Q.: Why then did you shoot the U-2 down? Was it a conscious provocation, a test, how far you could go?

A.: No. It was a human error by one of the commanders. This commander was not in a high position and he did not know the situation in Moscow, much less did he have any directions from Moscow. All he knew was that all the armed forces were on alert. And so for a minute or two he lost his nerves and pushed the button. Only then did he realize what big mistake he had made. He was afraid to report - and did so only much later. Only 10 years after did I find out who was responsible. It was a human error - but one, which could have led to awful results.

Q.: Did this incident influence Krushchev's decision-making? Did he feel that he now had lost control over events in Cuba and did he therefore consent to withdraw the missiles and finish the crisis?

A.: No. This incident did not influence the outcome of the crisis, did not influence Krushchev's final decision on whether to withdraw our missiles or not. The shot-down had a different impact. After the event strict orders were issued not to fire on U-2s again. The Americans were assured that it had been an accident and that it would not be repeated. And we asked the Americans to fly as high as they could - so that Fidel's artillery could not reach them. You know, just in case ...

Q.: This means that the Cubans were responsible for the attacks on the low-flying American reconnaissance planes on the same day? And this also means that you did not have military control over the Cubans?

A.: That's right. The Cubans shot at these planes. It was Fidel who had given order to hit them and shoot them down, all of them.

Q.: And the Soviets didn't have a possibility to change Castro's mind? You could not interfere with this decision?

A.: You see, our Ambassador, Alexejew, talked to him and asked him not to do so. But Fidel is a very independent man (laughs) - and he said: "No, I shall not permit it! We are an independent country and we cannot permit any violation of our airspace!"

Q.: Late in the evening of October 27th, Anatoli Dobrynin met Robert Kennedy. Strobe Talbott in his book "Krushchev remembers" quotes Krushchev as saying that Robert Kennedy had been afraid of a coup d'etat by the American military. The President, according to this memory, was under heavy pressure and feared that the military were going to take over. Does this come close to reality?

A.: I do not think so. I think this was the memory of an old man who mixed words and personal impressions.

Q.: What then was Robert Kennedy's intent and message?

A.: Well, the statement of Robert Kennedy was very much like an ultimatum. He himself did not call it this way, he called it "a statement of the facts". But it was a kind of ultimatum. If we got our missiles out, they promised us not to invade Cuba. But if we would not take the missiles out, they would do it for us - that's what Bobby said. This meant that they would have an airstrike - and we had thousands of troops down there, armed forces to defend the missiles. Obviously an air-attack would kill very many of our people. This we could not have left without any response. We clearly understood what the escalation would be like. And therefore we gave in. Only therefore.

2.: But Robert Kennedy also mentioned that it was only a question of three to four months before they would withdraw the Jupiters from Turkey. didn't he? Was this an important concession, an offer which convinced Krushchev to give in?

A.: No. It was not. Bobby's main idea was to give the ultimatum and to let us know that time was running out. He delivered an urgent message - and we got it. This was his point.

2.: But Fedor Burlatsky maintains that the Jupiter-promise was very important, that this was the most important message which convinced Krushchev to change his course.

A.: Again, I cannot agree with my friend Burlatsky. The major reason why Krushchev gave in was the ultimatum and the threat of imminent escalation. The Jupiter-thing was not a definite promise by Robert Kennedy, nothing official. And it was not the main part of his message. His major idea was to give an urgent message. The Jupiters definitely were a side-issue. The statement said: You take out the missiles or it will be done by

us. That's what counted. And I repeat: this promise to withdraw the Jupiter missiles in a couple of months was absolutely unimportant. It may have had some influence in discussions with members of the Presidium. But the thing which made Krushchev give in was the ultimatum, the threat of an air-strike and an invasion and the inevitable escalation.

Q.: After Krushchev had accepted the American demands, your father went to Cuba. In his talks with Castro he obviously had a hard time. He had to stay for almost four weeks before he had convinced Fidel. Which were the conflicts?

A.: Indeed, in the beginning the talks were bad. They were difficult, because Fidel was very, very strict appointed of the fact that he had not been consulted beforehand - that Krushchev accepted the ultimatum and only informed him afterwards. Another reason was that he did not trust the Americans. He could not believe that they would abide by their non-invasion pledge. He told my father: You Russians don't know anything about the Americans. Only we people of Latin America know what they are able to do, in spite of agreements of written law. Once you begin to agree to American conditions, they will put forward new conditions, will demand new concessions and will push you. It was not easy for my father to convince Fidel that this time we could believe the Americans and no invasion would take place. And still - Fidel was very angry.

Q.: Many critics claim that the consequences of the Cuban missile crisis were at times very negative. For example there is the idea, that the Soviet ICBM-program was spurred by the crisis, that the Soviets pushed forward their armament-programs because they never ever wanted to be in a similar inferiority. As one Soviet official told John McCloy: "You will never do this to us again". Do you agree?

A.: I do not exclude that our missile build-up was directly related to the crisis - even though I don't want to say that this was the right step to take. But it was understandable. Remember, in October '62 the Americans had a superiority in warheads of 17:1. And then we failed to deploy 40 MRBMs in Cuba. Therefore many military men and also the Politburo concluded that this unevenness should be corrected, that we should have more missiles, especially more ICBMs. They concluded that an American superiority of this dimension was dangerous. Since we could not have MRBMs close to the American border, we put ICBMs on the assembly line.

Q.: Are there any other consequences or lasting lessons worth mentioning?

A.: Well, the experience of the missile crisis contributed to the final rebuttal of the policy of "adventurism". It was a tragedy that Krushchev and John F. Kennedy passed from the scene. We lost 35 years in a senseless military competition. The policy of detente could have started right after the crisis. The stage was set. Both leaders started to respect and trust each other. We could have had the beginning of a real detente with no interruptions.

Mr. Mikoyan, I thank you for this interview.